

"FLAT!"

Barry Thorrburg

Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2018

APPROVED:

Eugene Martin, Committee Chair and Chair of
the Department of Media Arts
Harry Benshoff, Committee Member
Doug Henry, Committee Member
David Holdeman, Dean of the College of
Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
Victor Prybutok, Dean of the Toulouse
Graduate School

Thornburg, Barry. *"FLAT!"* Master of Fine Arts (Documentary Production and Studies), May 2018, 50 pp., references, 7 titles.

FLAT! immerses us into the life and mindset of a Flat-earthier who eagerly evangelizes the discoveries he and other Flat-earthiers claim to have made. With his car clad in flat-earth messages, he travels around the country provoking discussions with curious bystanders and debating scientists. While he thrives in this pursuit, it is not without its costs.

Copyright 2018

By

Barry Thornburg

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PROSPECTUS.....	1
Introduction and Description	1
Purpose.....	4
Intended Audience	7
Pre Production Research	8
Feasibility.....	8
Academic Journals	9
Books	10
Visual Media.....	11
Journalism	12
Web Forums.....	13
Conferences and Festivals.....	14
Ethical Concerns	15
Style and Approach.....	16
Treatment	20
Financing.....	21
Distribution Possibilities	22
Social Media	22
Schedule for Pre-Production, Production, Post-Production.....	23
RE-CONCEPTUALIZATION BEFORE PRODUCTION	25
INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE	26
Cinema-Verite and Direct Cinema.....	26
Ethics.....	28
Archival and Subject-Shot Footage	30
Structure and Continuity	33
PRODUCTION.....	35
Overview.....	35
Shooting Schedule	35
Crew	36

Equipment	37
Experience.....	37
Budget	38
Reconceptualization during Production	38
POST-PRODUCTION.....	41
Equipment and Personnel	41
Reconceptualization during Post-Production.....	43
EVALUATION OF COMPLETED WORK	44
Pre-Production	44
Production	44
Post-Production.....	45
APPENDIX: SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS.....	46
REFERENCES	50

PROSPECTUS*

Introduction and Description

FLAT! will focus on a “Flat earther” of Denton, Texas named Patrick Burke as he takes the audience on a pilgrimage to the site of his first experiment that he claims is proof of a flat earth. Locally, he is notorious for his large, hand-painted flat-earth signs and sculptures outside of his home in Denton, Texas. He excelled in school and attended West Point Academy in hopes of becoming an astronaut. But feeling unsettled about the direction and control his superiors had over him, he dropped out to rethink what he wanted to do with his life. After graduating from college he gained interest in the lunar landing hoax conspiracy theory via online video essays. From these, Patrick was convinced that NASA had faked the moon landings. One of the video essayists he found more convincing on the matter, Eric Dubay, also had videos regarding flat-earth theory which caught Patrick’s interest. Because of the videos’ ostensibly logical arguments and intriguing conspiratorial conjectures, he followed their advice to test for himself the truthfulness of their message. While on a trip in Pensacola, Florida, Patrick brought a telescope to a secluded beach and peered out into the ocean. Estimating the distance between him and an ocean liner he spotted off the coast and then accounting for the curvature of the earth using a math equation outlined in the YouTube video, he concluded that he should not have been able to see the large ship in its entirety if the earth was indeed curved. But there it was; the whole ship with water crashing against its hull as it slowly moved along the horizon. He took pictures with his phone to document his findings.

Patrick has engaged in a two-fold mission since this first experiment; (1) continue gathering evidence of the flat earth; and (2) re educate the public. He has purchased the infamous

* Copy of original submitted and approved by the thesis committee April 2017.

“flat earth camera,” the Nikon P900, which has a build-in 83x or 2000mm equivalent zoom. This allows Patrick the ability to record images that he and other Flat-earthers suggest are too far away to be able to see on a curved globe earth. He avidly spends his free time photographing phenomena that he claims to prove the earth’s flatness which the audience will have the opportunity to examine as the images he takes during the film will be shown on screen.

Patrick rejects the more popular “floating disk” and “dome” theories the majority of Flat-earthers espouse. This theory purports that the earth is a flat disk with an ice wall (what we know to be Antarctica) that encompasses the outer edge of the earth, and then a dome encapsulates the top side of this disk, containing the sun, moon, and stars within it as an enclosed system. He says this idea is no more superior than the globe earth model because it is simply another unscientific reimagining of the earth. Instead, he says, the earth is more likely an infinite plane, part of the universe we live in, rather than a ball or a disk floating in space. He says that the sun and moon rotate in a circular motion over the earth, which keeps the water melted underneath them, creating a wall of ice around us where the sun’s heat is out of reach. When pressed for the scientific proof of his theory, he instructs people to simply observe the way things work in our world and it will become obvious. He hopes to someday travel to Antarctica and travel beyond the ice wall via snowmobile to hopefully discover other earth-like regions on the infinite plane.

Second in his mission is to evangelize his message through the signs and sculptures on his house. While he feels this has resulted in many positive responses from his neighbors and passersby, it also led to a lawsuit with the city of Denton. The city accused him of breaking certain zoning laws regarding signage in residential areas and demanded he take his signs down. After a brief lawsuit, he continues to proudly advertise his flat-earth messages. More recently,

Patrick adapted this advertising method to his two vehicles which he strategically parks near universities and city centers in order to get the most attention.

A compelling aspect to Patrick's evangelism is the spontaneous cross-country "missions" he takes. Because he owns his own business in residential construction he has some flexibility in his schedule for extended trips. So after he has accumulated enough money, he will set off on a road trip in his flat-earth-adorned car to "buzz" various universities with his message; this includes driving through and parking in conspicuous locations in and around the university in order to garner attention. Once he feels satisfied with the attention he received in a location, he plans out his next destination based on what feels right to him at the time. He likens these missions to spiritual journeys with no specific timetables or destinations, lasting anywhere from a day to a couple weeks at a time. These trips have lead him to engage with people in places like MIT, Time Square, and the US Capitol.

Much like those from ancient human history, Flat-earthers depend on making sense of the physical world by what they experience with their senses, known more generally as phenomenalism. However, unlike our early ancestors, the followers of this theory are responding to what they believe to be powerful secret societies controlling the world's population by perpetuating the globe earth theory. The conspiracy group is both highly religious and anti-establishment in its foundation and intersects with other conspiracy theory groups. Many who believe the earth is flat also believe the lunar landings were faked, because the common belief is that the moon's physical nature, like the earth's, is allegedly not spherical as well. Though not all members of the flat-earth movement agree with the accompanying baggage that other members bring from other conspiracies, the flat earth seems to be a comfortable landing pad for a diverse range of conspiracy theorists.

Purpose

FLAT! will depict the life and mission of a dedicated believer of the flat earth conspiracy and its associated theories. This film will avoid the common depictions of conspiracy theorists found in mainstream entertainment media, and instead focus on humanizing my subject and exploring the beliefs and practices that come from this conspiracy movement.

This film creates a hybrid of Patrick's personal flat-earth story, retracing his steps of the past and documenting his present mission to spread his message. The route we take from Denton to Pensacola is the same route he took for his original experiment and will include major stops he made along the way, such as a pitstop at the NASA's Stennis Space Center in Mississippi, where he took a tour and reflected on his lifelong passion to be an astronaut before laying that dream to rest days later in Pensacola. Additionally, we will "buzz" universities such as Louisiana State University in Patrick's flat-earth vehicle, visit with physics and astronomy professors, members of Patrick's family, and ultimately observe a NASA rocket launch in Orlando. I will film Patrick as he interacts with strangers, friends and family along the way.

While this film directly examines flat-earth theories through Patrick's experiences, it also strongly references a growing anti-intellectual sentiment taking place in western culture today. The flat-earth conspiracy shares the same mistrust and paranoia towards science, academia, and government as climate science denial and anti-vaccine movements. While Patrick's beliefs are unconventional, his motivations are based on frustrations and concerns that our current global system is constructed in a way that oppresses and exploits its lower classes to benefit an elite few. This strong sentiment will likely come through as he discusses flat-earth theory with those who will inevitably ask Patrick about his belief in the flat earth. His advertisement of flat-earth messaging is designed to grab attention and inspire conversation regarding the topic. The film

will capture his evangelism which will likely lead to discussions about the alleged corruption and bias of our scientific communities, academia, and our governments, since they explicitly disagree with Patrick's assertions about the composition of earth.

FLAT! will also confront the relationship between reality and perception, and the potential effects of relying on a phenomenalist approach to science. Phenomenalism, the philosophy that our knowledge is confined to the things we can sense, was used anciently as a means of exploring and discovering our natural world. Flat-earthers appear to be reviving this technique to explain and describe their world. The film will capture Patrick's analysis of natural phenomena and the conclusions he draws based on his observations. He has a number of experiments to help him better observe natural phenomena and draw conclusions for himself which the film will capture. Some of these experiments expected to be filmed include observing the sun and its movements in relation to earth, observing the nature of large bodies of water and how they reflect the setting sun's light. But the film will focus on Patrick's first experiment, which involves using a telescope to observe distant objects on the ocean and then calculating how much of those objects should be visible if the earth is curved and the water's surface supposedly adheres to that curvature. In this exercise, we will get to explore Patrick's methodology, confirming what he sees in a flat horizon with what he observes in this experiment.

To further explore the complexity of phenomenism, photography as evidence will be an important discussion to explore in this film because photography, in the case of my subject, is the documentation of evidence of a flat earth. This relatively new technology transformed the art of observing natural phenomena. Some of the earliest uses of photographic technology was used for documenting and studying our natural world. Through Anna Atkin's *Photographs of British*

Algae: Cyanotype Impressions (1843) and William Henry Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* (1844) proved that photography, even in a most rudimentary form, was a useful tool in accurately documenting and disseminating information for various purposes.

When first popularized, photography was almost a perfect medium of expression for the newly emerging modern era, in which the complex mixture of chemistry and physics were used to record what appeared to be unadulterated, objective truth with exact detail. However this trust in photography was quickly turned on its head when that same process was used to deceive and manipulate. This is probably best exemplified by the Cottingley Fairies controversy starting in 1917. A series of photographs were made by two girls, ages 16 and 9, depicting the girls interacting with fairies in the wooded areas surrounding their home in Cottingley, England. The publication of these photographs convinced some—including the likes of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—of the existence of fairies in Cottingley, England. People debated the veracity of these photos, when eventually the two authors of the photos finally admitted, decades later, to faking them.

Photomanipulation of different methods has been used for artistic, practical and deceitful purposes throughout photography's history and the widespread use of digital photography has only increased—and even normalized—the use of even more nuanced photo manipulation techniques in contemporary times. However, this has not halted the use of photography as evidence, but instead placed greater emphasis on the credibility of the source of the photographs in question as an integral part of the evidence presented. This film will further explore this idea of evidence through photography as it follows Patrick's reliance on photography to document his evidence of a flat earth. He spends considerable amounts of time collecting images that confirm his beliefs of the flat earth intending to use them as proof of his claims. However, he distrusts

photography made by others because he does not know the context or how manipulated those photos might be. This film will capture this complex relationship with photographic evidence by observing his use of photography during his experiments and when sharing his photos with others. We will also tour the visitor's center at NASA's Kennedy Space Center, where he will have opportunity to comment on the photographs of the lunar moon landings and other photographs of NASA's space exploration.

To more directly reference the anti-intellectual movement *FLAT!* will discuss science directly. To do this, the itinerary for our road trip will include scheduled visits to places and people that will encourage discussion about science and how society is affected by it. When we visit Louisiana State University, Patrick will meet with Tabetha Boyajian, astrophysicist and public speaker, to discuss the scientific method and the role of professional and amateur scientists in our society. Boyajian is particularly relevant to this discussion because she is known for crowdsourcing citizen scientists to help analyze data about distant solar systems with great success. This conversation will hopefully confront Patrick's criticisms of the professional scientist community, his desire to pursue truth and share it with the world for its betterment and the methods and procedures needed to accomplish that. Conversations like these throughout our trip will show Patrick's yearning for human connection with those he comes in contact with, and illustrate his distrust for the faceless organizations he vilifies.

Intended Audience

My first target audience consists of males and females, ages 36-56, and have a predisposition to conspiratorial ideologies (i.e. a heavy mistrust and skepticism for governing bodies and institutions). These people do not exclusively adhere to left or right wing ideologies,

but generally have lower education levels and consider themselves working class. These people often feel marginalized and seek affirmation and community in online forums and discussion boards such as Reddit, 4chan, and Youtube. This group would be interested in this film because it offers an opportunity to explore new ideas and theories that might confirm or accent currently held suspicions.

My second target audience consists of males and females, ages 25-40, have an interest in science and technology topics (particularly space exploration), and could categorize as fans of science rather than participants in scientific communities. These people follow news regarding NASA exploration, and watch shows and listen to podcasts that celebrate scientific discoveries and development. They are typically middle-class, with some expendable income and leisure time, and actively participate in online discussion forums on Reddit, and Twitter. This group would primarily be interested in *FLAT!* for its exploration of a flat earth and its reaction to science. Often, this group has a curiosity in the topic because it contrasts the scientific community so starkly.

Pre Production Research

Feasibility

Because my subject is local to my homebase of operations in Denton, Texas, I am optimistic about the successful production of this film. Patrick's locality has allowed me to develop a positive relationship with him, building trust and working out the logistics of this road trip. He is highly motivated and strongly desires his story to be told, so his willingness to do research and practice shoots, as well as schedule out the logistics of our trip has been fairly straightforward.

Production is made up of two phases. First, we will film this road trip to Florida and back. This trip will require roughly \$4000 to accomplish and seven consecutive days of production time. I have no concerns about fundraising for this amount and my time spent planning with Patrick makes me confident production will run relatively smoothly. The second phase consists of a formal interview with Patrick where I can have him explain aspects of the trip that need further explanation, and help introduce his character further if needed.

While the budget for production and post production is low, marketing costs will require much heavier fundraising efforts. To help resolve this, I worked with Eugene Martin to develop a grant writing “Special Problems” course in which I have been learning best practices and developing important grantwriting skills under his guidance. Through what I have developed thus far, I have identified a sizeable portion of prospective funders on the local and national level and have already begun my grant writing process for them.

Academic Journals

Allahverdyan, Armen E., and Aram Galstyan. "Opinion Dynamics with Confirmation Bias." *PLoS One*, vol. 9, no. 7, 2014. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0099557>.

Boden, R. and Epstein, D. (2011), “A flat earth society? Imagining academic freedom.” *The Sociological Review*, 59: 476–495.

Gendler, T. S. (2011). On the epistemic costs of implicit bias. *Philosophical Studies*, 156(1), 33-63. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11098-011-9801-7>

Gerbaz, Alex. "Direct Address, Ethical Imagination, and Errol Morris's Interrotron." *Film-Philosophy*, vol. 12, no. 2, Sept. 2008, pp. 17-29. EBSCOhost, libproxy.library.unt.edu:9443/login?url=<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f3h&AN=34308651&scope=site>.

Hewstone, Miles, Mark Rubin, and Hazel Willis. "Intergroup Bias." *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 53, 2002., pp. 575-604, <https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/205801786?accountid=7113>.

- Levin, C. M., and Alicia R. Cruz. "Behind the Scenes of a Visual Ethnography: A Dialogue between Anthropology and Film." *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2008., pp. 59-68,
<https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/212633444?accountid=7113>.
- Lord, Charles G., Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper. "Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization: The Effects of Prior Theories on Subsequently Considered Evidence." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37.11 (1979): 2098-109. Web. 05 Oct. 2016. <<https://www.unc.edu/~fbaum/teaching/articles/jpsp-1979-Lord-Ross-Lepper.pdf>>.
- Schroder, Kim Christian. "Media discourse analysis: researching cultural meanings from inception to reception." *Textual Cultures* 2.2 (2007): 77+. Literature Resource Center. Web. 6 Oct. 2016.
- Sheng, Feng, and Shihui Han. "Manipulations of Cognitive Strategies and Intergroup Relationships Reduce the Racial Bias in Empathic Neural Responses." *NeuroImage*, vol. 61, no. 4, 2012., pp. 786-797doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2012.04.028>.
- Tajfel H, Turner JC. 1979. An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. WG Austin, S Worchel, pp. 33-47. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole
- Vraga, Emily K., Melissa Tully, and Hernando Rojas. "Media Literacy Training Reduces Perception of Bias." *Newspaper Research Journal*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2009., pp. 68-81,
<https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/200634558?accountid=7113>.
- Vydiswaran, V. G. V., et al. "Overcoming Bias to Learn about Controversial Topics." *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, vol. 66, no. 8, 2015., pp. 1655-1672doi:10.1002/asi.23274.

Books

- Atkins, Anna. *Photographs of British Algae*. 1st ed. 1880. Print.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell U Press, 1989. Print.
- Garwood, Christine. *Flat Earth: The History of an Infamous Idea*. New York: Thomas Dunne , 2008. Print.
- Heider, Karl G. *Ethnographic Film*. Revised Edition ed. Austin: U of Texas, 2006. Print.

Lasch, Christopher. *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type*. New York: Knopf, 1965. Print.

Talbot, William Henry Fox. *The Pencil of Nature, by H. Fox Talbot*. 1st ed. New York, NY: H.P. Kraus, 1993. Print.

Visual Media

Eric Dubay. "200 Proofs Earth is Not a Spinning Ball." Youtube. Youtube, 21 Oct 2015. Web. 22 Dec 2016.

Kytherocketman. "GoFast 2014 HD OnBoard Cameras." YouTube. YouTube, 18 Aug. 2014. Web. 30 Oct. 2016.

Michaelson, Ky. "Flat Earth Rockets and Balloons OH MY." YouTube. YouTube, 16 Aug. 2016. Web. 16 Jan. 2017.

The Anthony Cumia Show. "Neil deGrasse Tyson: Flat Earth, Fake Science & Space Exploration." YouTube. YouTube, 06 June 2016. Web. 16 Jan. 2017.

SwaysUniverse. "Neil deGrasse Tyson Responds to B.o.B's Flat Earth Talk Introduces Nephew TYSON." YouTube. YouTube, 08 Feb. 2016. Web. 16 Jan. 2017.

180 South. Chris Malloy. Magnolia Pictures. 2015. DVD

Seventeen. Joel DeMott, Jeff Kreines. 1983. VHS

Amy. Asif Kapadia. Film4, 2015. DVD.

The Last Waltz. Martin Scorsese. FM Productions. 1978. DVD.

Citizen Four. Laura Poitras. HBO Documentary Films. 2015. DVD

The Lego Brickumentary. Jason Bateman. Global Emerging Markets. 2014. DVD

Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things. Matt D'Avella. 2015. DVD

Super Size Me. Morgan Spurlock. The Con. 2004. DVD

Blackfish. Gabriela Cowperthwaite. Manny O Productions. 2013. DVD

The Imposter. Bart Layton. 24 Seven Productions. 2012. DVD

13th. Ava DuVernay. Kandoo Films. 2016. DVD

Man on a Wire. James Marsh. Discovery Films. 2008. DVD

What Happened, Miss Simone?. Liz Garbus. Moxie Firecracker Films. 2015. DVD

Dear Zachary: A Letter to a Son, About his Father. Kurt Kuenne. MSNBC Films. 2008. DVD

Restrepo. Tim Hetherington, Sebastian Junger. Outpost Films. 2010. DVD

More Than Honey. Markus Imhoof. Zero One Film. 2012. DVD

Lost in La Mancha. Keith Fulton, Louis Pepe. Quixote Films. 2002. DVD

Grizzly Man. Werner Herzog. Lion Gate Films. 2005. DVD

Lo and Behold, Reveries of the Connected World. Werner Herzog. Saville Productions. 2016.

Little Dieter Needs to Fly. Werner Herzog. Werner Herzog Filmproduktion. 1998. DVD

Primary. Robert Drew. Drew and Associates. 1960. DVD

Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment. Drew and Associates. 1963. DVD

Twinsters. Samantha Futerman, Ryan Miyamoto. Small Package Films. 2015. DVD

Requiem for the American Dream. Peter D. Hutchison. Naked City Films. 2015. DVD

Iris. Albert Maysles. Magnolia Pictures. 2014. DVD

Nanook of the North. Robert Flaherty. Egami Media. 1922. DVD

Man with a Movie Camera. Dziga Vertov. Kino International. 1929. DVD

Jane. Drew Associates. Doc Club. 1962. DVD

Gimme Shelter. David Maysles, Albert Maysles. Criterion Collection. 1970. DVD

Don't Look Back. D.A. Pennebaker. Criterion Collection. 1967. DVD

Journalism

Gefter, Amanda . "The Case Against Reality - The Atlantic." The Atlantic. Atlantic Monthly Group, 26 Apr 2016. Web. 20 Oct 2016.

Goldhill, Olivia. "What is reality? Whatever you think — Quartz." Quartz — News, videos, ideas, and obsessions from the new global economy. Quartz, 16 Sep 2016. Web. 16 Sep 2016.

Goldhill, Olivia. "Presidential debate: A philosopher explains why facts are irrelevant to Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton — Quartz." Quartz — News, videos, ideas, and obsessions from the new global economy. Quartz, 1 Oct 2016. Web. 1 Oct 2016.

Kriss, Sam. "Flat-Earthers Have a Wild New Theory About Forests - The Atlantic." The Atlantic. Atlantic Monthly Group, 9 Sep 2016. Web. 10 Sep 2016.

Kriss, Sam. "YouTube's Flat Earth Conspiracy Theorists See a Truth Better than Reality - VICE." VICE - Original reporting and documentaries on everything that matters in the world.. Vice Media LLC, 5 Feb 2016. Web. 10 Sep 2016.

Mallaby, Sabastian. "The cult of the expert – and how it collapsed | Sebastian Mallaby | Business | The Guardian." News, sport and opinion from the Guardian's US edition | The Guardian. The Guardian, 20 Oct 2016. Web. 20 Oct 2016.

Pomeroy, Ross. "Conspiracy Theorists Aren't Who You Think They Are. 'The View' Is Full of Them. | RealClearScience." RealClearScience - Opinion, News, Analysis, Video and Polls . Real Clear Science, 2000. Web. 22 Mar 2017.

Tyson, Neil DeGrasse. "What Science Is -- and How and Why It Works." The Huffington Post. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 18 Nov. 2016. Web. 16 Jan. 2017.

Web Forums

Admin. "NASA's Fake CGI Ball Planets" The International Flat Earth Research Society. 31 Dec, 2015. Web. 18 March, 2017. <http://ifers.123.st/t20-nasa-s-fake-cgi-ball-planets>

Admin. "Read This Before You Get Banned!" The International Flat Earth Research Society. 31 Dec, 2015. Web. 18 March, 2017. <http://ifers.123.st/t6-read-this-before-you-get-banned>

cikljam. "GLOBAL CONSPIRACY." The Flat Earth Society. 24 Nov 2014. Web. 02 February 2017.
"<https://www.theflatearthsociety.org/forum/index.php?topic=62346.0>"

Ibarabi. "Heliocentrism vs Geocentrism : gifs." Reddit. Reddit inc., 30 Nov 2016. Web. 30 Nov 2016.
<http://www.reddit.com/r/gifs/comments/59bl5g/heliocentrism_vs_geocentrism/>

NASA. "Join the @Space_Station crew for holiday dinner! Watch as they share their favorite foods & walk down memory lane: https://youtu.be/ZPIz9_Zv2FA ." 25 Dec 2016, 1:10pm. Tweet. Note the flat earth comments.

Thinkforyourself. “Warning for Religious People” The International Flat Earth Research Society. 31 Dec, 2015. Web. 18 March, 2017. “<http://ifers.123.st/t146-warning-for-religious-people>”

Conferences and Festivals

1. Tallgrass Film Festival - Kansas, USA
2. Doc NYC
3. 360 Science and Technology Film Festival
4. Geek Fest Toronto
5. Toas Shortz Film Festival
6. InScience Dutch Science International Film Festival
7. World Film Festival
8. International Scientific Film Festival
9. The Big Easy International Film Festival
10. Thin Line Film Festival
11. Holly Shorts Film Festival
12. Show Me Shorts Film Festival
13. Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival
14. Doc Edge Festival
15. 45th Student Academy award
16. Big Sky Documentary Film Festival
17. South Texas Underground Film Festival
18. WorldFest-Houston
19. Texas International Film Festival
20. Texas Independent Film Festival
21. Texas Cinemania International Film Festival

22. Glen Rose Neo·Relix Festival
23. Nacogdoches Film Festival
24. DYNAMIX International Film Festival
25. Fort Worth Bizarre Film Festival
26. West Texas Film Festival
27. Heart of the Pines Film Festival
28. Rockport Film Festival
29. Marfa Film Festival
30. Hill Country Film Festival
31. Interurban Film Festival
32. Lone Star Film Festival
33. Austin Film Festival
34. CineFestival
35. 24fps International Short Film Festival
36. Oak Cliff Film Festival
37. Dallas Video Fest
38. Dallas International Film Festival
39. USA Film Festival
40. Albuquerque Film and Video Experience
41. Gallup Film Festival

Ethical Concerns

My primary ethical concern is that this film does not disrespect Patrick and the vulnerable position he is placing himself in to be in my film. While I do not agree with his views, I must reverence his willingness to let me into this very important part of his life. To do so, I have taken

time over the last few months to develop a relationship with him, developing a shared respect between each other and our differing viewpoints. We have identified common ground and openly acknowledged our differences. Part of this relationship has involved transparent discussion about the film project, my intentions behind it, the possible risks and outcomes for Patrick for participating in this film. I have involved him in some aspects of the creative development of the film and have given him ample opportunities to discuss his concerns. Our conversations about the open endedness of the outcomes of this film have been particularly important. I have made it clear to Patrick that I do not know, and cannot know how the publication of this film will affect him, but that my intentions are not to harm him or stop him from his flat-earth pursuits.

Style and Approach

Often, we distance ourselves from people who exhibit extreme differences from societal norms and I will counter this tendency by implementing a wide angle lens in our observational footage, forcing the camera to be in close proximity to Patrick throughout the film. This avoids the voyeuristic gaze of a telephoto or zoom lens, which closely examines a subject but maintains a distance from him or her as well. This problem is well illustrated in the film *ABC Africa*, in which the filmmaker, Abbas Kiarostami, explores the AIDS crisis in Uganda using a handheld digital camera with a built-in zoom function on the lens. Throughout the film, he walks through streets, people's houses, and hospital wings often pausing when he happens across a person that seems to typify third-world poverty or human suffering. His use of the zoom function on his camera is particularly problematic as he records these subjects from standing positions with some distance between him and them. Instead of physically moving closer to his subjects to get greater detail of the suffering he wants the audience to witness, he often chooses to zoom in

instead, foregoing the intimacy and mutual respect needed to get such a shot without zooming in. This sets up an implicit power dynamic between the filmmaker and the subject. The filmmaker has the privileged position of examining the vulnerable subject in great detail without needing to ask permission or establish a relationship with him or her, undermining the intended message of compassion his film attempts to create. This can sever the audience's emotional connection to the subjects when the intention was to accomplish the opposite.

Evidence of this desired intimacy is found in *Seventeen* (1983), in which the filmmakers utilize a wide-angle lens while following working-class teens of Muncie, Indiana. This places the camera in the middle of the action and conversations that the characters engage in, but it also allows for an intimate experience for the audience. This aesthetic helps mitigate the power dynamic that *ABC Africa* participates in, bringing the filmmaker into the same situations and environment as the subjects, requiring some kind of understanding and familiarity between filmmaker and subject. Turning both the filmmaker and subjects into participants and simulating a pseudo-participant mode with the audience. Likewise, my use of a wide-angle lens will combat this power dynamic by keeping the camera, and, therefore, the audience's perspective in close proximity to Patrick, fostering an intimacy that is not as easily established with a zoom lens. The goal is to help my audience gain an empathetic connection with my subject in spite of their possible disagreement with his ideology, thereby humanizing Patrick when the audience's natural tendency might be to do the opposite.

Restrepo (2010) creates a similar dynamic, in which the intimate, embedded, style of filming for observational footage affords the audience an opportunity to empathize with the film's characters in spite of the controversial nature of the war taking place in the film. The proximity of the camera to the characters during their struggles and leisure facilitates a prosocial

and empathic sentiment toward them. But while this filming technique does attempt to connect the audience to the characters emotionally, it does not have a corollary emotional connection with the war that they are engaged in, allowing audiences to interpret the controversial war based on their emotional connection to the soldiers. Though *FLAT!* will not have the same extreme and dire situations as *Restrepo*, this embedded aesthetic has similar potential. The intent is to allow the audience to empathise with Patrick in spite of ideological differences, so that the issues Patrick presents must be grappled with in relation to what they have learned about him.

Also like *Restrepo*, *FLAT!* will include a formal interview to accent the observational footage. In the interview, Patrick will engage the audience directly using the “interrotron” method developed and popularized by Errol Morris in his films like *The Fog of War*. In such a film, the interrotron interview method makes use of a series of teleprompters that both the interviewer looks through to see the subject and the subject looks through to see the interviewer. The end result is an image in which the subject is looking straight into the camera for the duration of the interview, inadvertently directly looking at the audience. This direct address approach produces particularly powerful results in *The Fog of War* as Robert McNamara discusses the controversial decisions he made during the Vietnam War while he appears to be addressing the audience directly. Alex Gerbaz argues that this encourages an ethical, humanizing view of McNamara, because it forces him to face the audience while explaining his moral ambiguity toward controversial choices he made and the audience has the opportunity to examine based on this directness they otherwise would never have gotten. Similarly, I recognize the controversial nature of flat-earth theory, and wish my audience grapple with the topic while acknowledging Patrick’s humanity, rather than dismissing him as the Other. Fostering this ethical view of Patrick regardless of how disagreeable his thoughts may be transforms this film

from a platform from which Patrick simply shares his ideas, to a conduit in which the audience might understand his motives behind his ideas.

The film will include time lapse photography and other observational footage as transitions between scenes. Transitions like these are not uncommon to contemporary films. In the case of *Twinsters*, time lapse photography of cityscapes are used as transitions. However, while aesthetically appealing, these sequences have little relevance to the story. This adds breaks in the story that can create a stuttered effect for the momentum of the story, much like television commercials often do for TV programming. In *180 South* (2015), timelapse transitions are used extensively throughout, but they focus on landscapes and sites that are relevant to the story. After the characters of the film discuss the perils of their attempt to climb Patagonia, the scene is punctuated with an observational shot of the peak looming high above the other features of the landscape as daunting evidence of the discussion that just took place. This moment without dialogue, simply viewing the mountain, allows the audience to interpret the information presented in the scene and ponder the future journey ahead of the travelers. Likewise, The transitions used in *FLAT!* will focus on natural world phenomena, including landscapes during sunrise and sunset, astrophotography, and weather patterns specific to the themes and discussions found in each scene. These visuals offer relevant reference points and transitional moments for the audience to reflect on during the film and can prepare them for the next scene.

While my personal interactions with Patrick are likely unavoidable during production, this film will not focus on our relationship. Reflexivity in the film is unavoidable especially considering the close proximity we will have with him throughout, but my relationship with him does not accomplish the goals that I wish to pursue. The focus of the production is to reflect on how he came to believing the flat-earth conspiracy, observe his current efforts to share that

message with others, and to offer the audience a simulation of what it is like to interact and get to know Patrick as he shares his story; the visual approaches employed for this film are designed around creating this experience.

Treatment

Just before daybreak, a man carries a telescope out onto a dock overlooking the ocean as cargo ships lurk in the distance. On the anniversary of his first experiment, he sets up and aims his telescope at the most distant boat he can see just like he did two years prior. Peering through the eyepiece he smirks. “You can see it,” he says, “The whole thing. The boat is what, 10 or 15 miles away? If the earth was round, there’s no way we’d be able to see the whole boat at that distance.” For Patrick Burke, the earth is flat. He knows it and wants everyone else to know it too.

“It’s only a matter of a few years before it all comes crashing down,” he says as he walks across the dock back to his small car adorned in handwritten messages about the flat earth. “Yeah, I’m tempted to go to one of these NASA sites and start handing out unemployment forms, partly out of jest, and partly out of compassion for the innocent people who are going to lose their jobs over the big revelation.” Patrick loads his telescope in the back of his car, sits down behind the wheel and takes a few moments to reflect on this moment and decide on the next location he will travel. This stop was only a nostalgic diversion on his mission to spread his message.

Pulled up to a security booth outside the Kennedy Space Center, a middle-aged man in a uniform and sunglasses takes a second look Patrick’s flat-earth car before approaching the driver’s window. “Is this for real?” he asks, laughing. “Of course! That’s the point.” Patrick

shoots back with a smile. “You’re here for the rocket launch, then?” the security guard asks, this time with some sarcasm. “Actually, yes. I just wanted to see what my taxes looked like getting shot off into the sky.”

Standing on a beach just outside of the launch site, Patrick sets up his camera on a tripod in anticipation of the impending rocket launch. “I’ve wanted to do this for a while; track the rocket as it arcs over around 80,000 feet rather than continuing up into ‘space,’” he says while changing his camera settings. “That’s about 40 miles shy of the Karman Line, where space begins. It’s gonna be a good laugh!”

Financing

This film has the incredible advantage of having a substantial amount of resources which bring the costs of production down considerably. As seen on my proposed budget approximately half (over \$25 thousand) of my entire budget is in-kind contributions consisting of equipment and man-hours. This has made production particularly affordable. I only need approximately \$4000 for production and post production work. I am seeking funding for the production from several local organizations that have shown interest as well as more personal contacts that have a vested interest in science education and literacy.

To seek for funding for the remaining Marketing and Administrative expenses I will seek fiscal sponsorship from the Austin Film Society, and apply for their AFI film grant. Based on my research, I have identified the following organizations from which I will seek funding:

- Princess Grace Film Awards
- Impact Partners Fund
- The Filmmaker Fund
- Documentary Company

- Roy W. Dean Grant
- Craigslist Charitable Fund
- Communities Foundation of Texas

Distribution Possibilities

Being a first-time filmmaker/director, I have no significant reputation, which means that the film's festival run is an essential element in the distribution of *FLAT!* This will provide notoriety for the film and provide opportunities to network and further fundraise. While I will submit to more conventional festivals such as Hotdocs and DocNYC, I want to focus on thematic/genre-based festivals that focussed on science and social phenomena. Additionally, Texas-based festivals will serve as a tertiary focus because they are plentiful and easily attended. After the completion of this festival run, I have budgeted for a self-distribution VOD model in which *FLAT!* will be available for viewing on iTunes, Amazon, and Google Play.

Social Media

My social media strategy is carefully planned out to work in conjunction with the production and release of my film and create an interactivity between my audience, my subject, and the film. Our social media will hinge on a blog-based website that allows users to post sightings of Patrick's flat-earth vehicles around the country on a graphical flat-earth map along with photos. We will preload this map with photos Patrick has already taken of his car at various destinations like Washington DC, Time Square, the Florida Keys, and more. Then, during our trip, we will be posting our own photos of his vehicle to this blog and encouraging others to do the same. Then, after production, during our festival run, anytime Patrick can make it to a

festival, we will make the sighting of his car at the festival a promotional tool for the festival's screening.

The site will also include announcements and screening schedule for the film and updates on Patrick's latest news. Twitter, instagram, and Facebook will be used to connect people to the website and keep our audience updated on the film.

Schedule for Pre-Production, Production, Post-Production

June 19

- Leave Denton for Houston, TX (4-hours)
- Tour Kennedy Space Center

June 20

- Leave for Pensacola, FL (9 hours)

June 21

- Morning Demonstration of 1st experiment
- Leave for Orlando, FL (9 hours)

June 22

- **View Rocket Launch at Kennedy Space Center**
- **BUZZ** University of Central Florida Astronomy program

June 23

- Leave for New Orleans, LA (11-hours)

June 24

- Visit NASA Stennis Space Center
- Leave for Houston, TX (6-hours)
- **BUZZ** Louisiana State University

- Meet with Professor Tabetha Boyajian

June 25

- Leave for Denton, TX (4-hours)

RE-CONCEPTUALIZATION BEFORE PRODUCTION

It was advised to me by my thesis committee during my prospectus defence that my original plan for a formal interview with Patrick would not be necessary because so much of my stylistic approach with him as a subject offered generous opportunities for expository dialog. Performing a formal and highly stylized interview such as the one I originally planned on seemed not only redundant but also out of place from an aesthetic perspective. So I decided to modify my approach to incorporate questions into my observational work for on-the-go interviews.

It also became increasingly difficult to schedule production around a rocket launch because variables such as weather often canceled the launches that we were able to travel to. After consulting Patrick about this, we decided to forgo the rocket launch and plan on the upcoming Solar Eclipse because it was highly predictable and reliable and we could travel easily to locations in which the Solar Eclipse could reach totality.

Additionally, right before production, Patrick revealed that he had a small library of digital footage he was willing to let me use in the film. This library included footage from his original trip to Pensacola, other road trips he previously participated in, and “evidence” footage of various experiments he has conducted. This became an incredible opportunity for helping to sculpt the story of the film, but in an effort to protect his privacy, I recommended that he review the footage before giving it to me to make sure he is comfortable with what might end up in the final film.

INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

Cinema-Verite and Direct Cinema

Cinéma-vérité, “the act of filming real people in uncontrolled situations” (Mamber, 2) became a significant influence on the theoretical framework behind the production of the *FLAT!* Much like Jean Rouch’s conception of Cinema-verite with “the participating camera of kinopravda” (Rouch, 98) my approach to the production of *FLAT!* incorporated a hybrid of observational, participatory modes unlike the direct cinema methodology in which the crew remains as unobtrusive and disconnected from the action as possible.

Known for films made with his brother such as *Grey Gardens* and *Salesman*, Albert Maysles last film, *Iris*, was a key influence in developing the voice of *FLAT!* In it, there are moments in which Maysles remains unobtrusive, strictly observing the action of his subject, Iris Apfel. However, much of the film engages in a participatory mode, in which Iris interacts or responds to the filmmakers, though we often do not get to hear Albert speaking to Iris. I found this presentation of the subject intimate and focussed and a desirable approach especially because it had the potential to give Patrick something to respond to and interact with during my observations. However, I felt that if I inserted myself, or my voice into the film in any prevalent way, it would distract from my primary focus on creating a personal portrait of Patrick and his relationship to his community and would instead showcase my relationship to him. But while *Iris* provided a model in which I could mimic, I felt I needed a structural guide to help me understand how to prioritize the footage I would gather within this formative framework.

Documentary editor and director, Jacob Bricca, attempts to stratify various formative conventions within documentary in what he calls the “hierarchy of intervention.” He lists types of documentary footage in order of “how much intervention from the filmmaker is shown.” or

how much of an artifice is perceived in the footage by the audience. Title cards and narration require the most intervention from the filmmaker because the filmmaker is blatantly telling the audience what to think. Bricca suggests that interventions like this, while straightforward, have the ability to create skepticism within the audience, making it more difficult for the filmmaker to express his or her message. Observational or verite footage, according to Bricca, portrays the least intervention from the filmmaker, ideally allowing the audience to feel like they are experiencing a spontaneous event and in which they can interpret for themselves.

Interviews are found sandwiched between these two elements, but broken down into various types: Formal interviews automatically acknowledge the artifice of the film because the subject is in an unnatural location, answering questions posed by the filmmaker, whereas informal interviews allow the subject to stay in their more natural habitat, removing at least some of the visuals that suggest a filmmaker's intervention; audio interviews, according to Bricca, portray the least artifice because they have the advantage of performing exposition without visually acknowledging the artifice of the film. If constructed carefully, we can "avoid reminding the audience about the artificiality of the experience, [and] there may be a greater chance that they will let down their guard and enter the world we are constructing for them." (Bricca, 99).

It seems worth noting that Bricca approaches documentary editing with a narrative or fiction film mindset in which he constructs characters and story out of the footage provided to him rather than attempting to present "reality" in any meaningful way (Bricca, xii). While his acknowledgement of the facade of truth in documentary reflects an honesty about the nature of documentary film, this perspective alone lacks an acknowledgement of the genre's tendency to exploit the non-actors who are often volunteering parts or all of their personal lives for what often becomes the entertainment of others; whereas fiction films often do not share this

problematic structure because the people captured within the frame are also detached from the characters they are enacting. I can not help but feel that Bricca's approach, unchecked, has an inevitable tendency to dehumanize the subjects the filmmaker is filming. That said, provided we take care to respect the participants of a film, Bricca's approach can be a useful one in terms of finding meaning within a mass of footage and constructing it in a way that can create a compelling story.

Ethics

I find it incredibly important to uncover and weigh the ethical concerns inherent in each project I pursue. The film/video medium is an inherently problematic one because it attempts to distill aspects of the human experience into a two-dimensional, often rectangular plain. Even with recent development in the area of virtual reality, the limitations of audio/visual media further emphasizes subjectivity. Complicating things further, the documentary genre has a tacit responsibility to provide the truth, when few formative elements differentiate or redeem it from the same problems its fiction counterparts have. The very act of creating photographic images—moving or not—is a subjective act, inserting the photographer's selective perspective onto the audience. In speaking about film's abilities to act as evidence, Bill Nichols states that “the image, like a footprint in the grass or a stain on a coat, has the ability to offer evidence of more than one thing, within more than one ideological frame, with more than one rhetorical and political effect, depending on what we ask of it” (Nichols 37). He outlines how an image is created, framed, and even interpreted, each within an ideological frame. Ideology is inescapable. Ideological rhetoric is the limited language from which we express ourselves. Which means that objective truth is ultimately unattainable in any media, but most certainly in the documentary format. This directly

pushes against conventional attitudes toward nonfiction genres in general because of the aforementioned expectation that the audience will be presented with some expression of truth and/or reality.

When considering the ethical concerns I might face in the production and distribution of this film, I felt a responsibility toward two primary groups: my subjects, and my audience.

Patrick expected that my film would attempt to portray him accurately at least, if not in a positive light. I visited with him several times prior to filming having lengthy conversations about my filmmaking process, attempting to be transparent about my motives, that this production was in partial fulfilment of my Masters of Fine Arts program, and that I had a thesis committee guiding me in my process. Of these points, Patrick notably inquired about my thesis committee and what their ideological standings were. I explained what each of their areas of study were and that one of their primary concerns were that I make this film in a way that does not intentionally harm him.

I also felt a responsibility to make it clear to him that I did not share his belief system, but that I was interested in understanding the person behind the belief system. This did not seem to dissuade him from participating in the film, but appeared to bolster some confidence in the project, possibly because of my openness with him.

My audience was my second concern after Patrick. I found myself worrying about what my audience's takeaway would be from this film. I understood that this topic was not simply a quirky belief system that a small minority of people quietly practiced. This topic was increasingly given time on the popular cultural stage with several celebrities making public statements outing themselves as Flat-earththers. In some circles, it seemed to me that the flat-earth movement was becoming a symbolic representation of the absurdity of other popular conspiracy

theories. To say the least, flat-earth theory was not very highly regarded. So it became a priority to use the documentary film language—conventions as discussed before such as Bricca’s “hierarchy” —as a means to humanize Patrick and provide the opportunity to help the audience feel like they were getting authentic access to Patrick. This understanding also compelled me to withhold some footage that would have easily cast Patrick in an irredeemable and unfavorable light. The final product, I feel, is a balance between creating sympathy for Patrick and allowing him to represent himself in the way he chose.

Archival and Subject-Shot Footage

Self-shot archival footage has risen in popularity in contemporary documentary cinema. While technology has developed convenient tools that act as a vehicle for this trend (e.g. home video cameras and smartphones), likely the primary driving force in the inclusion of this storytelling element in documentary films is the effect this unique footage has on the audience. Self-shot archival, particularly self-shot diary footage, signals a certain level of authenticity to the audience that traditional footage produced by a documentary crew has a difficult time matching. Diary footage in particular can suggest that the absence of a film crew significantly decreases the subject’s performative role. Filmmaker Jerry Rothwell discusses how self-shot footage transforms the documentary medium from a medium in which the filmmaker observes a subject, to one in which the subject can now be the observer as well, but that the great attraction to self shot footage is that it “plays into our fantasy of seeing what really goes on when we aren’t there” (Rothwell, 153). Admittedly, this was my initial attraction to Patrick’s archival.

In terms of the hierarchy of footage previously outlined, this type of footage can become a hybrid of several of the traditional strata at once. It can fulfill the expository role of an

interview, while simultaneously offering an opportunity to observe the subject in a state and location that appears authentic, making this type of footage very useful to the filmmaker. For example, in *FLAT!*, when we see zoomed-in footage of the moon shot by Patrick while hearing him discuss his observations about the apparent convexity of the moon's surface, I found this to be an important moment in which I give the audience a perceived break from the artifice of my filmmaking to spend time with Patrick who then controls what the audience hears and sees. Conversely, if I had inserted a portion of interview footage in which Patrick explains to me that he questions the popular understanding of the physical nature of the moon, I assume the effect would be perceived differently by the audience because the audience would assume his answer comes in reaction to the filmmaking process I imposed on him as opposed to a presumably self-motivated action.

Drawbacks to self-shot footage include the natural problems that occur in the aesthetic quality of the footage when a nonfilmmaker assumes the role of filmmaker. Problems with shakiness, over or underexposure, or misinformed choices of frame rates, codecs, and formats can frequently compromise the footage. In a previous film I directed, *Life Project*, I gave my subject a small camcorder to film personal diary footage. A technical problem I overlooked was his own ability to operate the camera. After spending weeks with the camera, he returned it to me proud of the meticulous work he did in documenting his feelings regarding the topic of our film. Excited for the hours of material I would get to sift through, I found the camera's memory card was empty still. Through troubleshooting with my subject, it was revealed to me he had forgotten to press record each time he would sit down to make a new diary entry. I overlooked the training he would need to reach a basic level of competency with the camera. With *FLAT!*, I considered myself lucky that Patrick had several years of practice with consumer-grade cameras and that his

mission to document the findings of his experiments inspired him to invest in several cameras that had higher quality features such as image stabilization, higher resolutions, that made for clear footage I could easily utilize.

However, the drawback to self-shot footage that I ran into most was the lack of control I had in how, when, or what Patrick chose to record. Filmmaker Jerry Rothwell reflects on this issue stating that “because the filmmaker-director will usually be absent when material is shot, they are necessarily pushed to adopt a more distant role of briefing, support, or selection.” (Rothwell, 154). I found that Patrick was not interested in making personal diary videos and he openly admitted that it would be difficult for him to remember to record many of the things he did that I found significant. Because of this, many of the experiences he would later tell me about, such as marching through UNT campus with an American flag to raise awareness of the so-called lunar landing hoax, he had no footage of because he forgot to bring his camera with him. One way I circumvented this problem was by searching through social media to find people who did record some of these more conspicuous encounters Patrick had in the public sphere. I would then ask the users who posted these videos and photos for permission to use their footage. This then added another layer of self-shot footage to my film. While this process of negotiating when and how things are filmed had its difficulties, I appreciate the fact that it helped transform the director/subject relationship into a director/participant one.

Utilizing Patrick’s footage allowed Patrick to have a voice in the making of the film, leveraging his access to unique footage that I would likely never have access to. He had the opportunity to sift and edit which footage was up for consideration, and we spent cumulative hours discussing what role the footage could play in the film. While this did not suddenly eliminated the problematic power dynamic inherent in our relationship completely, I did find it

helpful in giving Patrick a creative voice in the making of the film. I found that it allowed me the opportunity to hear out his ideas for the film more and further understand what his priorities in being filmed. In all, I felt the inclusion of his self-shot archival footage was a welcome addition to *FLAT!* for both the unique opportunity to get an insider's perspective on the topic, and also to help transform Patrick's and my relationship in the process.

Structure and Continuity

FLAT! explores the ideology of Flat-earthers through the experiences of a single character and his interactions with others. Ultimately I found structure and meaning by loosely structuring the film around the traditional mono-myth, or more commonly known as the hero's journey. Patrick begins on his mission to share his message, he encounters some opposition (debates with community members), he responds with new tactics (yard art), those tactics are ultimately spoiled (vandalism), he goes into the belly of the beast (NASA) and comes out finding that he has succeeded in some way by discovering fellow believers. I found that even if audience members did not readily recognize my intent to structure the story in this traditional packaging, the film did engage my test audiences in ways that my previous, more topical, chapter-like structure did not.

One problem this presented was that in order to create a story with a sense of continuity in the structure, I had to break with the chronology of my footage. For example, the debate that Patrick has in which he reveals that he does not believe in gravity and his discovery of the Richey Family at the end of the film were separated in the editing process even though both events happened only moments apart in reality.

While this presents a story that is not factually accurate in terms of chronology, I felt that the way the film portrayed the community's opposition to Patrick and his ultimate sense of isolation helped to emphasise his genuine excitement in meeting other Flat earthers. Placing this debate scene in the same ending scene the Richeys left this discovery feeling less gratifying because the family catches him in a moment of contention. In the current version, we setup the final scene depicting Patrick alone as people pass him by. Starting the scene in this way, with a moment of community-imposed isolation, makes the revelation of the Richey's more impactful.

The actual chronology of events ends up playing a very minor role in the significance of Patrick's story; thus, references to time or even geography are sometimes sacrificed in the efforts of conveying other things with greater meaning. This is why parts of Patrick's radio interview is found interspersed throughout the film; each piece of exposition Patrick provides in that interview becomes more meaningful when juxtaposed with specific scenes that relate thematically even though they have no chronologically significant relationship to the the radio interview. Therefore, *FLAT!* may be quite scattered in a literal, chronological sense, but in terms of theme and story arch, I feel I took an approach that represents Patrick with a spirit of honesty and fairness.

PRODUCTION

Overview

Production primarily consisted of four scheduled shooting days, however flexibility was a necessity as it was discovered in the preproduction process that Patrick Burke's schedule was particularly volatile. While he was committed to the project, it was understood that we would have to adapt to inevitable changes during production. Later, as Patrick disappeared for some time and we shifted focus on the Richey family, our production time frame extended into our post production schedule.

Shooting Schedule

- Monday, June 12 - 5:00pm

Observational footage of Patrick going through archival footage from his original trip to Pensacola. Crew: Barry, Katie
- Friday, June 16 - 3:45pm

Observational shoot with Patrick as he parks his truck in Denton's square. On the go interview asking him to describe his methodology for advertising the flat-earth message using his vehicle. Crew: Barry, Michael, Katie
- Saturday, June 17 - 4:00pm

Observational shoot showing Patrick setup new "yard art" in his front yard. On the go interview describing his process for deciding on yard art. Attempt to capture the community's reaction to his flat-earth messaging. Crew: Barry, Michael, Katie
- Saturday, July 1 - 10:00am

Observational shoot of Patrick setting up a flat-earth display and talking to passers by about the flat-earth message. Crew: Barry, Michael, Matthew
- Friday, October 6 - 7:15am

Observational shoot with the Richeys, capturing morning routine, preparing for kids to go to school, and Erik for work. On the go interview includes discussion about religion and how it plays a role in their daily lives, and how flat earth affects their daily lives.

- Tuesday, October 10 - 2:30pm

Observational shoot of the Richey girls getting home from school, discussing what they had learned at school, and meal time with the family. On the go interview about frustrations with the public school system and how flat-earth beliefs are marginalized in the system.

- Saturday, October 21 - 6:00pm

Observational shoot of Shoshawna Richey and her kids cooking pies together. On the go interview about her methodology in raising her kids and how she teaches flat earth to her kids.

- Saturday, January 20 - 4:00pm

On the go interview with Erik and Shoshawna at the Lake where Erik proves the earth's flatness using observation and the scriptures. This scene is to contrast Patrick's experiment that also takes place on the lake's dam.

Crew

I recruited Michael Mullins as my cinematographer. He has extensive experience as a camera operator and I wanted the opportunity to focus on directing as much as possible. So having a cinematographer that I felt I could trust was paramount. I operated the camera in most of my prior work, so handing off that responsibility was unusual, but a welcome change. This arrangement allowed me to concentrate more on my subject and helping him feel comfortable and setting up realistic expectations for him and the crew.

I also chose to have Katie Meyer, an undergraduate student, record sound. She had no prior production experience, but was eager to learn and expressed interest in helping me with my project long before production. Because mentorship is an important aspect to my work as a creative artist, I use this as an opportunity to teach her production skills and give her the experience of spending legitimate time on a production. To mitigate the obvious risks, we met several times in which I instructed her on the basics of sound recording, fundamental theory, the

physics of sound, and training on running the sound equipment. She and I felt confident in her abilities and we are both satisfied with the work she produced.

Equipment

I chose the Sony FS7 as my primary camera of choice because it required few other accessories to use in a shoulder-mounted configuration and offered exceptional flexibility in the overall digital image created due to its relatively higher bit rate and image quality. This flexibility was mainly experienced in post production, where I was able to manipulate the image for accurate color correction and grading with greater ease without losing image quality.

As for my sound recording system, I chose a traditional setup using a field recorder/mixer, the Sound Devices 633, a wired lavalier microphone attached to my subject, and a shotgun microphone attached to a boom pole. This provided my production sound recordist the ability to capture sound from my subject with ease with the lavalier microphone while using the boom microphone as either a second source of audio for my subject or to capture audio of those who interact with him.

Experience

Production overall was a pleasurable experience. We were able to set up production dates pretty easily, and when significant unplanned events happened, we were generally flexible enough to accommodate schedule changes. At times in which no crew was available for these unplanned events, I would take a camera and a wireless lavalier microphone with me to where Patrick was in order to document the experience. For example, both the radio show and the

vandalism he experienced at his house were fairly unplanned and my crew was not readily available. Thankfully, my ability to function independently proved valuable in these moments.

One production day became a health concern for myself and Michael Mullins. It was our shoot on the Denton Square in July. Everyone's health was already a concern of mine in planning for this day of production because of the intense midday heat we would inevitably experience for several hours. So I brought water, drinks and snacks for everyone and encouraged crew to take frequent breaks to rehydrate. Michael even took breaks in his car running the air conditioner to help him cool down. In spite of these precautions, both Michael and myself suffered mild heat exhaustion and needed several days after the shoot to fully recover. Thankfully it did not become a more serious problem, however this experience did teach me to take the Texas summer heat more seriously and avoid it if I can.

Budget

I ended up spending very little for production thanks to the hours of volunteered time of my crew, the equipment available to me from the school, and the cancelled Nashville trip. A copy of the final budget breakdown is found in the appendix.

Reconceptualization during Production

As mentioned previously, we had planned a larger trip to go see the solar eclipse. We were going to drive out to Nashville, Tennessee where the phenomenon would reach totality. However, about two weeks before the trip, I lost contact with Patrick. After numerous attempts to contact him by phone and at his house to no avail, I cancelled the trip and notified my crew a few days before we were to leave. Believing he had abandoned the project but feeling I did not

have adequate footage to complete the film, I began looking for new paths that would help me finish it. At this point we had already filmed the sequence in which Patrick meets the Richey family. Because of the release forms I had them sign, I was able to make contact with them again to see if they would be interested in me filming them as well. After a lengthy conversation with them about the focus of the film and what my goals were with the story, they agreed to let me film them. We agreed on a schedule that would last into the fall, during our post production phase.

Just the day before we would have left for Nashville, I was able to make contact with Patrick again. He expressed his anxiety about the trip and concerns about his liability for the crew since he would be driving his vehicle, and that all the planning I had done was overwhelming to him. His only way of responding in a healthy way was to lose contact and wait things out. I apologized for the anxiety I caused him and we briefly spoke about ways we might be able to communicate with each other better to avoid situations like this in the future. However, because I had shifted my focus away from Patrick at this point, we did not continue production with him after this experience except for two pickup shoots in September 2017 and February 2018, in which I conducted brief interviews with him to get some responses that we felt would help fill small gaps we had in our story.

I have learned as a filmmaker that it is easy for me to get wrapped up in the details of the production, losing sight of the overall story and how the footage I gather fits into that story. Because of the shifted focus away from Patrick and onto the Richeys, I spent a considerable amount of time attempting to fit them into the film in a more substantial way. At the time, I was interested in contrasting their spiritualistic way of navigating the flat-earth theory to Patrick's secular methodology. It was fascinating to see the patterns that made both so similar, and the

conflicts that forced them to disagree with each other. However, this proved to be counterproductive and will be discussed in greater depth later.

POST-PRODUCTION

Equipment and Personnel

Early on in pre-production, Sergio Almendariz (MFA documentary production and studies candidate) expressed interest in editing this film. I felt confident that we would work well together because he was a competent editor and a valuable contributor to the greater discussion on storycraft. We decided that Adobe Premiere would be our primary nonlinear editing application because we both had personal subscriptions to the application and the university also utilized it, making the platform more flexible for collaborative meetings other platforms. This is not to say that there were no drawbacks to this choice. Premiere has a reputation as a somewhat unstable application when under stressful or more complex projects. Adobe also frequently updates the software, which presents compatibility problems when opening project files on various computers that may not be updated regularly. But we decided the accessibility of the application outweighed these drawbacks provided we took coordinated countermeasures to ensure our software was up to date and that we made backups of our footage and project files regularly.

I brought on, Austin Crum, a media arts undergraduate, as an assistant editor to prepare footage for editing. His primary responsibilities were to log the raw footage so that Sergio could edit more efficiently. Because of his unique exposure to the footage, he developed an increasingly influential voice in the editing process as he began to recognize patterns and associations within the footage. One challenge his role presented to me was the temptation to distance myself from the footage. Logging footage, in past projects, provided me exposure to the raw footage that I did not automatically get now that I had someone else doing this for me. I had to make a concerted effort to set time aside to watch rushes so that I had a clear idea what

contribution or relationship each shoot made to the overall story. But because I was watching the footage in this project free from the technical task of logging, I found myself more mentally available to sense patterns, themes, and associations in the footage.

My conceptualization for music and its role in this film came late in the editing process. It was not clear to me whether music would be appropriate for this film until we were in the “fine cut” stage of editing. Thanks to some networking help from Eugene Martin with the college of music, I began working with Ronald Harris, a music composition undergraduate student. He and I discussed the film, watched it together, and decided we wanted music that was compositionally traditional in a cinematic sense, while utilizing unconventional instrumentation. Ronald and I decided upon several string and vocal elements we thought would be appropriate for the film, and then we highlighting each section we thought should have music and identified its tone and pacing. I found my personal background in music helpful in our discussions because it provided me a vocabulary I could use to express my vision for the film in ways that seemed easy for Harris to relate to.

The workflow that Harris’ and I agreed upon for scoring the film made the process particularly easy. He would work on a rough draft of a section of the film and then send me a video with the music and the film in synchronization for proofing. When needed, I would request particular changes and he would send me a new video for my approval. This process expedited the composition process allowing me to give near immediate feedback on the work he was doing. Once final approval was given for a track of music, he would schedule recording time with the artists he chose, record the track, and then send me a sound file with notes on the particular timecode the sound file was to be placed within on the timeline.

Reconceptualization during Post-Production

Choosing to begin post production with my editor while continuing to shoot offered opportunities for my editor to make recommendations on what he would find beneficial for me to gather in terms of footage while I was shooting. However, after several roughcuts, it became clear that the Richey family's footage was actually taking away from the story as a whole.

I initially drew upon the film *I Am Not Your Negro* as a structural guide. I attempted to mimic its use of thematic chapters in which to create a sense of structure. But ultimately, after several unsatisfying cuts, I decided to remove the Richeys because it was hard not to make the comparison between them and Patrick without vilifying Patrick's character. The Richeys were very relatable and likeable. They were a cute family that worked traditional jobs and functioned in society much like anyone else would. Comparing them to Patrick, who views himself as a full-time activist, who argues with people he comes across, and freely vocalizes particularly extreme views; it was difficult not to dehumanize him and turn him into the unrelatable Other. This was counterproductive to my goals with the film and so I ultimately had to make some radical changes.

After removing them from the story, I could reevaluate Patrick's footage with what felt like were fresh eyes and I discovered what loosely felt like a traditional mono-myth story arch in his footage. It did not take long to assemble a new cut in this new structure, further refine it, test screen it, and move into a fine cut and then picture lock.

EVALUATION OF COMPLETED WORK

Pre-Production

Originally, *FLAT!* was intended to be a character-driven story revolving around Patrick on his journey back to the location of his first experiment, ultimately ending with Patrick's observations of a rocket launch. Considering the available funding at the time and the unpredictability of rocket launch schedules, we changed our plan to include the solar eclipse observation in Nashville, Tennessee. Even though this fell through, much of my research and preparations for production proved useful in piecing together a meaningful story. Planning for this road trip allowed Patrick and I time to discuss in great detail our intentions for this film and to build a closeness that made I think helped production run as smoothly as it did. Evidently there was still room for developing trust in our relationship, but what trust we were able to develop was still meaningful for me since I had the responsibility to humanize him in my film.

Production

In spite of the schedule cancellations, production flowed smoothly. My crew was exceptionally adaptable to the changes we needed to make and their professionalism on site was notable. The footage we produced facilitated an effective post production workflow.

The primary conflict in production came from my response to Patrick's disappearance. Rather than taking time to review the footage we had already gathered again to assess the need to shooting more material, I assumed that what we had gathered was not adequate and looked for other opportunities to expand upon the work we had already done. This decision extended production needlessly, utilizing my crew and budget on footage I ended up never using.

Even though we did experience some friction during production, my relationship with Patrick is still cordial and he still avidly awaits the film's debut. I found learned from this experience that it was important to provide him ample time to communicate his feelings about the production and our schedule. In the few pickup shoots we had with Patrick late in the post-production phase were successful and an enjoyable experience.

Post-Production

The flow of post-production, at first, was dependent on our continued production with the Richeys. My editor spent ample time waiting for new footage from my shoots with the Richeys to be synchronized and logged. But probably the most time consuming aspect of our post-production experience was spent in troubleshooting our story problems while attempting to combine the Richey's footage with Patrick's. Regardless of the challenges this produced, I am pleased with the clear communication and collaborative spirit of both Sergio and Austin throughout the process. Once we decided on the new story structure and that we would only introduce the Richeys at the end of the film, the editing process was straightforward because we had a clear vision of the story, and knew how the pieces fit together.

Regardless of the difficulties I encountered in the process of making this film, I am deeply satisfied with the results. Incorporating and expanding upon my theoretical understanding of film language and ethics has enriched my experience and given me tools to apply to future projects I direct or participate in. In all, I feel what I learned in this process has helped me to hone my skills as an artist and further shaped my voice as a storyteller.

APPENDIX
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Budget

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Budget Assumptions						
2	Shooting Formats: UHD Video						
3	Total Run Times: 28-minutes						
4	Intended Delivery Date: November 2017						
5	Countries of Production: USA						
6	Currency of Production: USD						
7							
8	Description	Rate in \$US	Quantity	Duration	Total Cost	In Kind	Cash
9							
10	Preproduction Research						
11	Proposal Development Fundraising	\$300.00		10	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00	\$0.00
12	Character Research	\$300.00		2	\$600.00	\$600.00	\$0.00
13	Research Shoot	\$500.00		1	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$0.00
14							
15	Subtotal Pre Production Research:				\$4,100.00	\$4,100.00	\$0.00
16							
17	Production						
18	Director	\$500.00		10	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$0.00
19	Director of Photography	\$300.00		10	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00	\$0.00
20	Location Sound Mixer (Road Trip)	\$300.00		10	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00	\$0.00
21	Location Sound Mixer (Interview)	\$300.00		1	\$300.00	\$300.00	\$0.00
22	Camera Package (Road Trip)	\$633.00		1	\$633.00	\$633.00	\$0.00
23	Audio Package (Road Trip)	\$814.00		1	\$814.00	\$814.00	\$0.00
24	Camera Package (Interview)	\$463.00		1	\$463.00	\$463.00	\$0.00
25	Audio Package (Interview)	\$528.00		1	\$528.00	\$528.00	\$0.00
26	Lighting & Equipment (Interview)	\$232.00		1	\$232.00	\$232.00	\$0.00
27	Equipment insurance	\$450.00	1		\$450.00	\$450.00	\$0.00
28	Media Storage (SD cards)	\$107.00	1		\$107.00	\$107.00	\$0.00
29	Media Storage (HDD)	\$400.00	1	allow	\$400.00		\$400.00
30	Color Card	\$114.99	1		\$114.99	\$114.99	\$0.00
31	Meals	\$15.00	20		\$300.00		\$300.00
32	Subtotal Production:				\$15,341.99	\$14,641.99	\$700.00

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
34	Post-Production						
35	Editor: Picture Sound	\$100.00		20	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
36	Offline Editing Suite Rental	\$2,000.00	1	month	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
37	Transcription of Dialogue	\$200.00	1	allow	\$200.00	\$200.00	\$0.00
38	Music	\$2,000.00	1		\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
39	Sound Mix (Stereo, 5.1)	\$2,000.00	1	flat	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
40	Color Correcting	\$2,000.00	1		\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
41	Closed Captioning	\$200.00	1		\$200.00	\$200.00	\$0.00
42	Subtotal Post Production:				\$10,400.00	\$10,400.00	\$0.00
43							
44	Marketing						
45	Photography	\$500.00		1	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$0.00
46	Print Marketing Materials	\$1,500.00	1	allow	\$1,500.00		\$1,500.00
47	Electronic Press Kit Development	\$400.00	1	allow	\$400.00	\$400.00	\$0.00
48	DCP Encoding	\$750.00	1	allow	\$750.00	\$750.00	\$0.00
49	Festival Entry Fees	\$50.00	30		\$1,500.00	\$250.00	\$1,250.00
50	Festival travel (Domestic)	\$400.00	5		\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00
51	Festival travel (Foreign)	\$800.00	4		\$3,200.00		\$3,200.00
52	Website: Domain registry (\$10/year)	\$10.00	5		\$50.00		\$50.00
53	Website: Design	\$500.00	1	flat fee	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$0.00
54	Website: Hosting (\$96/year)	\$96.00	5		\$480.00		\$480.00
55	Subtotal Outreach:				\$10,880.00	\$2,400.00	\$8,480.00
56							
57	Administrative Costs						
58	Legal Support: Basic Contract	\$350.00	1		\$350.00	\$350.00	\$0.00
59	Legal Support: Drafting Release Form	\$200.00	1		\$200.00	\$200.00	\$0.00
60	Legal Support: Register Copyright	\$40.00	1		\$40.00		\$40.00
61	Legal Support: Contingencies	\$500.00	1	Allow	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$0.00
62	Bookkeeping (per year)	\$300.00		1	\$300.00	\$300.00	\$0.00
63	E&O insurance	\$3,000.00	1		\$3,000.00		\$3,000.00
64	Contingencies (3%)	\$1,500.00	1		\$1,500.00		\$1,500.00
65	Subtotal Administration:				\$5,890.00	\$1,350.00	\$4,540.00
66					Total Cost	In Kind	Cash
67	Project Total Costs:				\$46,611.99	\$32,891.99	\$13,720.00

Appearance Release

Video Release Form

The undersigned enters into the following agreement ("Agreement") with Barry Thornburg ("Producer"). I have been informed that Producer is capturing footage and that my name, likeness, image, voice, appearance and/or performance is being recorded and made part of the recording in which I appear ("Product").

1. I grant Producer and its designees the right to use the Product in any format, now known or later developed. I grant, without limitation, the right to edit, mix or duplicate and use or re-use Product in whole or in parts as Producer may elect. Producer or its designees have complete ownership of the Product, including copyright interests.
2. I grant Producer and its designees the right to broadcast, exhibit, market and otherwise distribute the Product, in whole or in parts, and alone or with other products, for any purpose Producer or its designees determine. This grant includes the right to use Product for promoting or publicizing.
3. I have the right to enter into Agreement and am not restricted by commitments to third parties.
4. Producer has no financial commitment or obligations to me as a result of Agreement.
5. In consideration of all the above, I hereby acknowledge receipt of reasonable and fair consideration from Producer. I have read, understand and agree to all of the above and that the rights granted Producer herein are perpetual and worldwide:

Print Name

Signature

Date

If this person is under age 18, legal guardian must sign below. I certify that I am the legal guardian of the model named above. I give my consent to the foregoing on his or her behalf.

Print Name

Signature

Date

REFERENCES

- Bricca, Jacob. *Documentary Editing: Principles and Practice*. Routledge, 2018.
- Iris*. Albert Maysles. Magnolia Pictures. 2014. DVD
- Mamber, Stephen. *Cinema Verite in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary*. Mass., 1974.
- Nichols, Bill “The Question of Evidence, the Power of Rhetoric and Documentary Film”, *Rethinking Documentary: New Perspectives, New Practices*. Edited by Austin, Thomas, and Wilma De Jong. Open University Press/McGraw Hill Education, 2008.
- Nichols, Bill “The Question of Evidence, the Power of Rhetoric and Documentary Film”, *Rethinking Documentary: New Perspectives, New Practices*. Edited by Austin, Thomas, and Wilma De Jong. Open University Press/McGraw Hill Education, 2008.
- Rothwell, Jerry. “Filmmakers and Their Subjects”. *Rethinking Documentary: New Perspectives, New Practices*. Edited by Austin, Thomas, and Wilma De Jong. Open University Press/McGraw Hill Education, 2008.
- Rouch, Jean. *Cine-Ethnography*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2003. Print.